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DE RUEHJB #0466/01 1761349
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 251349Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0390
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS BUJUMBURA 000466

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/C

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [BY](#)
SUBJECT: NKURUNZIZA'S FACE-TO-FACE WITH FNL'S RWASA
KICKSTARTS BURUNDI'S PEACE PROCESS

¶1. (U) Summary: In an unprecedented meeting, Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza and PALIPEHUTU-FNL rebel leader Agathon Rwaswa met privately on June 18 in Dar es Salaam, marking a significant milestone in the resuscitation of the September 2006 ceasefire agreement. The two men agreed that the FNL would submit a list of FNL political prisoners, whose release will help to revive the ceasefire process. In closing their tte--tte, President Nkurunziza and Mr. Rwaswa exchanged personal telephone numbers to show their commitment to heading off additional roadblocks to the ceasefire implementation. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Burundi,s President Pierre Nkurunziza met with PALIPEHUTU-FNL head Agathon Rwaswa on June 18 in Dar es Salaam. At a June 20 briefing in Bujumbura conducted for the diplomatic corps, the Burundi Special Representative for the President of the African Union, Ambassador Mamadou Bah, and the United Nations Secretary General Executive Representative in Burundi, Youssef Mahmoud, reported that the meeting between the Nkurunziza and Rwaswa ended with agreement over the following points:

- There is a commitment to reviving the JVMM process in fully implementing the September 2006 ceasefire agreement;
- The PALIPEHUTU-FNL will provide Burundi,s Ministry of Justice a list of what the FNL considers political prisoners,;
- Nkurunziza and Rwaswa will give instructions to their respective parties to continue the implementation of the ceasefire agreement; and
- Each time an issue arises which threatens the continuation of the peace process, Nkurunziza and Rwaswa will personally take measures to ameliorate the situation. The two leaders exchanged personal telephone numbers in support of this decision.

Behind Closed Doors

¶3. (U) Mr. Mahmoud explained that after a seemingly intractable blockage of progress with the Joint Verification Mechanism and Monitoring (JVMM) process, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations in Burundi (BINUB) requested the regional intervention team, including South Africa,s President Thabo Mbeki and President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, to help kickstart the implementation process of the September 2006 ceasefire agreement. Prior to the meeting in Dar es Salaam, President Kikwete and the facilitation team met with Rwaswa and others on the margins of the event to define the objectives for the gathering and to offer their

assistance and participation if necessary. Tanzanian President Kikwete, expressing his desire for direct involvement and delaying his departure for Uganda, first met separately with President Nkurunziza and the FNL rebel leader. Bah and Mahmoud could not provide the details of these preparatory meetings. Upon the completion of the Kikwete meetings, Nkurunziza and Rwaso finally met privately behind closed doors.

¶4. (U) As a condition for the resumption of the JVMM, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL has consistently requested the release of political prisoners,. In his discussions with President Nkurunziza, Rwaso agreed to submit a list of perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 names of imprisoned FNL members whom he considers to be political prisoners,. The Government of Burundi,s (GOB,s) Ministry of Justice will then determine whether the individuals on the list are political prisoners, or criminals, per the ceasefire agreement. In response to a question concerning the surprisingly high number of combatants on the list, Ambassador Bah suggested that it may have been better to consider a wider range of names rather than for either side to pre-determine individual eligibility. Ambassador Bah speculated as well that the source for the number of potential political prisoners, may have been Tanzanian newspapers and not a figure necessarily agreed upon during the private meeting between the two leaders.

¶5. (U) In responding to another query, Ambassador Bah addressed the perceived absence of any movement on the question of power-sharing, as the PALIPEHUTU-FNL is integrated into facets of the military and the government. Ambassador Bah speculated that the question of power-sharing, was, in all likelihood, discussed during the meeting, but that each side may have been lacking the political support at the meeting to fully discuss the issue and to make progress. In Ambassador Bah,s view, the issue

is no longer a question of reshuffling to achieve numerical balance but rather one of a more strategic nature. The absence of any mention of these discussions does not, however, indicate that it was not a topic at some level, Bah stressed.

What next?

¶6. (U) According to Ambassador Bah and Mr. Mahmoud, President Nkurunziza and Rwaso may meet again in Bujumbura; however, it is unclear when Mr. Rwaso might travel to Burundi,s capital city. Mahmoud stressed that everyone involved in the continuation of the peace process, including the diplomatic corps and international organizations, needs to be vigilant to any signs or maneuvers which would delay the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. He asked that the United Nations and regional partners take the necessary steps to encourage continued dialogue and progress. He opined that everyone needs to keep their ears to the ground, for future roadblocks to success. The World Bank representative to Burundi, Allasane Sow, emphasized that further delays with the ceasefire implementation will hamper Burundi,s ability to meet international financial benchmarks.

¶7. (U) When queried on the future role of the facilitators in the peace process, Mr. Mahmoud stressed the importance of a universal message of mutual trust and confidence, a common comprehension of the issues, and seeking practical measures for removing blockages to progress. Mr. Mahmoud also suggested that it is necessary to de-politicize, this meeting between Nkurunziza and Rwaso and, instead, support the ongoing facilitation beyond the technical aspects to make significant progress in the JVMM. Ambassador Bah added that, despite the PALIPEHUTU-FNL,s desire to have international observers present during all negotiations, no parties outside of the Burundian government should participate in the meetings as these interferences, only serve to politicize, the process.

18. (U) Both Ambassador Bah and Mr. Mahmoud characterized the atmosphere of the Dar es Salaam meetings as friendly and jovial. GOB officials and PALIPEHUTU-FNL members greeted each other casually and amicably. There did not appear to be any hidden agendas or reservations in the manner or content of speeches given by either side, according to Bah and Mahmoud. They commented that the congeniality can best be exemplified by the concluding group photo, with the two major players standing side by side, and everyone in smiles.

Comment

19. (SBU) The Nkurunziza-Rwasa meeting clearly indicates that both men are making good-faith efforts towards reconciliation. The apparent conviviality between not only the principals but also their respective teams during the meetings belied the initial expectations of international observers. This may suggest that the gap between the two sides may be narrower than previously thought and that prospect for ultimate reconciliation are commensurately more promising. Both men recognize that Burundi,s long-term stability and economic development depend to a large extent on the country,s ability to achieve a durable peace. The evolution of this process may ultimately depend, in turn, on their willingness to use their personal hotline, which they opened in Dar es Salaam. End Comment.
MOLLER